

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 107 (2013) 43 – 51

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

Evaluation of Learning for Performance Improvement International Conference
Malaysia, 25-26 February 2013

Human Resource Management Practices and Employment Experience of Malaysian Employees in New Zealand

Ainie Hairianie Aluwi^{a*}, Shamsul Baharin Saihani^b

^{a,b} *University Teknologi MARA, Centre for Management Development Studies,
Faculty of Business Management Level 9, FSK2,3,4, Puncak Alam 42300, Malaysia*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore human resource management (HRM) practices in New Zealand and its impact on individual Malaysian employee's experience. Through qualitative interviews, this paper found that four HRM practices; namely, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and socialization as significant HRM practices in New Zealand organizations. Thus, this paper reveals Malaysian employees' employment experiences vary according to sector. This paper found a subtle discrimination against individuals because of their religion and immigrant status. Finally, it was evidenced that socialization enables employees to integrate and accept organizational HRM practices.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia

Keywords: HRM practices; Employment Experience; Workplace Diversity

1. Introduction

Extant research suggests that a number of studies identifies issues addressing how HRM practices should be used to manage workplace diversity in organizations (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2006; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006). However, these practices are not well addressed in the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60-12-284-4779; fax: +60-3-3258-5000.
E-mail address: ainie402@salam.uitm.edu.my.

context of how employees from different cultural backgrounds experience HRM practices of their organizations. The issue of whether it is enough to have HRM practices that address everyone equally is still debatable. Hence, HRM practices cannot address the differences that exist between ethnic origins by simply asking them to go through diversity programs during orientation or diversity training. Workplace diversity needs to be examined from the employees' perspectives to understand the impact of HRM practices on culturally diverse employees.

This study defines workplace diversity as the organizational environment that allows people with multiple backgrounds, mindsets, and ways of thinking to work effectively together and to perform to their highest potential in order to achieve organizational outcomes (Prasad et al., 2006). While diversity management is the act of managing people of different ethnic origins, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, religions, genders, ages, educations, lifestyles, working styles, ways of thinking, experiences and knowledge within an organization (Palmer, 2003).

Most literature on workplace diversity from employees' perspectives focused on equality or organizational justice issues (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Edgar & Geare, 2005; Hunter, 2003). However, this paper proposes to explore HRM practices differently by focusing on culturally diverse employees' employment experience. Overall, by studying the employees' employment experience, this paper will be able to contribute to the literature and directly learn from how HRM practices impact employees, specifically Malaysian individual working in New Zealand.

This paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, it explains the methodology and key findings of the interviews of Malaysian employees regarding their employment experience in New Zealand. Secondly, it discusses the emerging conceptual framework. Finally, the conclusion explores limitation, and future research possibilities in employees' employment experiences.

2. Methodology

This exploratory and qualitative research uses social constructionism to respond to the main research question; "Which HRM practices impact employees' employment experience?" This study attempts to achieve an understanding of the interaction between the organization (HRM practices) and individual (Malaysian employees) in a specific social context (New Zealand) (Crotty, 1998). In addition, this study defines knowledge as "relative and socially constructed by individuals in a social context" (Coolican, 1999, p. 196). This research is designed to develop a preliminary framework from a multilevel perspective on workplace diversity (Syed & Pio, 2010).

2.1. Data Collection

Narrative approach was used to gather data to allow the researchers to capture the experience as perceived by employees. Legally employed Malaysian employees working in New Zealand were used as a sample for this study. Malaysian with permanent resident and work visa status are also included in the study. However, for the purpose of this study, five interviews were appropriate to initiate and explore the constructs to be implemented in larger project after the conceptual framework was introduced. According to O'Leary (2010), once data saturation was achieved in a qualitative study, researchers can stop the data collection process. Although, this study was not intended to obtain a statistically valid sample, the researchers identified several relevant industries that have a number of Malaysian employed to give the study a broad representation. The interviewees were selected from a few industries such as ICT, Education, Public and Retail sectors. Wellington was chosen due to the accessibility to the location. In addition, Wellington has a substantial number of employed Malaysian individuals in the population.

The study used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling strategy. The researchers obtained interviewees through their personal networks of the Malaysian community in Wellington coupled with snowballing technique to give strength to the narrative approach used for data collection. The recruitment of interviewees was done through face to face contact and followed up by an email of the questions to be answered. This ensured the interviewees have time and space to reflect and tell their experience in their own words.

First, the researchers conducted an in-depth exploratory interview to gather the personal chronicles of Malaysian individuals working in New Zealand. The interview was conducted in English and interviewees were given the choice to answer in English, Malay or a combination of both to minimize potential lost of information because of language barriers. Guided open-ended questions were used to explore employees' employment experience and HRM practices in organizations. The interview guides consisted of three types of information including (1) demographics information (e.g., the description of their social identity or background as they perceived it), (2) their organizational HRM practices, and (3) how these HRM practices have impacted them. The interview lasted for up to 60 minutes each. The interview was conducted at interviewees' office during lunch hour as it was convenient to the respondents. A digital recorder was used to record the conversations with the respondents. Researchers also took notes to observe any body language that may indicate any significant gesture towards the interpretation of the interviewees' employment experience. The interview was summarized in English in every five minutes interval of the conversation.

2.2. Validity and trustworthiness of the study

In general, researchers have an obligation to demonstrate that their studies are credible. The researchers use a whole set of procedures to reflect a valid and trustworthy study. The data was analyzed for emerging themes and develop an open coding by grouping data into categories (O'Leary, 2010). The data was analyzed in two stages: (1) simultaneously with the interview process and (2) after all interviews were conducted. This allowed the researchers to utilize member checks (Syed & Pio, 2010) to verify that the interviewees' personal chronicles were represented. Member check was done at the end of each interview by presenting the interviewees with a summary of what have been said via email. Also, the research team shared the emergent themes and seeks comments from the interviewees. Ethics approval was obtained for this study. The questions that the researchers asked the interviewees did not cause any physical, psychological or career harm to the participants. However, employment experience as a result of HRM practices was sensitive and personal, given the status and culture of the study's respondents. Employees wanted their opinions and concerns with HRM practices to be kept confidential. Thus, the study was strictly confidential and only researchers knew who they were. Usage and release of the data was in aggregate form only. Participants were told that the interview was voluntary, and were given the chance to receive a copy of the summary of the study.

This exploratory study was dependent on the researchers interpretations of the data collected. To ensure the validity of this study, all correct procedure was applied to find the answer to the study's primary question (Kumar, 2005). Personal chronicles were elicited to ask and prompt questions that are relevant to this study. This ensured the trustworthiness of the study (O'Leary, 2010). Thus, authenticity was achieved by ensuring that the interviewees are respected during the process of interview and analyzing the data. Finally, the researchers were transparent in the way the research process was conducted from beginning to the end. This allowed researchers to show the reliability of the study. Unlike quantitative study, qualitative study requires a great deal of detailed administrative process to ensure the "dependability" of the methods, documentation, and design are done in a systematic manner (O'Leary, 2010, p. 43).

3. Results

The interviews explored the personal chronicles of 5 Malaysians working in New Zealand and their experience of HRM practices. Table 1 shows the profile of the study's respondents. Interviewees are employees of organizations in Wellington, who have been employed for at least a year in the organization with more than 50 employees.

Table 1: Code names for respondents

Code name & Gender	Age	Marital Status	Sector	Time in New Zealand	Time in current organization
Respondent A/Male	33	Married	ICT	3	3
Respondent B /Male	42	Married	Retail	3	3
Respondent C/ Male	26	Single	ICT	9	3
Respondent D/ Female	40	Married	Education	8	6
Respondent E /Female	37	Married	Public	10	4

3.1. Description of Organizational Practices

Organization in New Zealand focused on four basic implementations of HRM practices. The study originally, examined three main areas of HRM practices, which were (1) recruitment and selection (2) training and development, and (3) performance management. However, as a result of the study a fourth area emerged as a significant practice in New Zealand organizations. Malaysian employees identified (4) socialization as the fourth significant area of HRM practices in New Zealand organizations.

3.1.1. Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment and selection process seem to have some conflicting experience. This employment experience varied according to sector. In retail, ICT and education sectors, they were more open towards diversity in the workplace, particularly Malaysian employees. Professional position such as law and accounting, there seems to be a bigger percentage of discrimination towards people who do not belong to the dominant Male and Anglo-Saxon group. Malaysians trying to get a job in this position found it to be very difficult to get a job offer after graduation. However, once respondent D and E have the experience, they did get easier. Respondent B and D, who came here to obtain a job in professional position, had to start at a lower position compared to their experience from overseas. However, the respondents said that they were willing to start off with a lower position as long as they are able to obtain a position that they are passionate about. Respondent C continues to practice law by taking up volunteer work. There seems to be no discrimination when employees are not being paid for their services. Discrimination towards Malaysian employees in New Zealand was very discrete. There is no specific evidence to proof that it is happening. However, Malaysian employees feel that they are differences in the manager's treatment towards their employment compared to his or her colleagues who are native New Zealanders (Kiwis). Burns (2000) explain the reasons for being discriminated during the recruitment process are employers do not think applicant will 'fit in' and have stereotype views of Asian employees.

3.1.2. Training and development

All interviewees felt that once on the job, they were very satisfied with the training and development opportunities given to them. All respondents said that they had the chance to obtain training and development programmes that were directly related to the development of their jobs or even for their personal development. They did not feel that they were discriminated against the chance for training and development. However, when asked if they need to attend special programme to help them cope with the working environment in New Zealand, all of respondents had a consensus that they were able to cope on their own without any training. They agreed that it was not the responsibility of the organization to conduct such diversity program. Respondent E demonstrates her inclination to show her employers that she can cope, but would source for such program using her own time. All interviewees were mainly concerned with upgrading their skills because they wanted to ensure that they would be able to compete with local employees. They left that if they have the skills they will be able to obtain a better position and enhance their career development. This was also discretely described as a way to overcome any possible discrimination towards their immigrant status.

3.1.3. Performance management

Four out of five respondents mentioned they did not mind the blunt and direct feedback given to them by their managers. Performance management practices were a big surprise for Malaysian employees. Contrary to the literature on Malaysian work culture (Lim, 2001), they found it easy to take blunt and direct feedback. However, they were shocked with the process. They thought that performance appraisal process was confidential and not to be seen by the employees. Respondents were surprised that it was a two way process. Respondent C, D and E mentioned selling themselves to the managers for promotion was very difficult because they came from a culture that required them to be humble.

3.1.4. Socialization

Socialization was a practice that emerged from this study. Malaysian employees found that the socialization process was very significant to their development in the organization. The respondents mentioned after office parties, such as Friday parties, half-year parties, Christmas parties, and morning teas are great ways to get to know the organization and even get to know management. However, respondent D still found it hard to treat her CEO as one of her colleagues at work. In Malaysia, status is very important (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2003). Top management should not mingle with lower level management position staff. Employees must treat their CEO and managers with a high level of respect. Employees show respect by not having eye contact with the person or talking to them regarding matters that are not related to work (Abdullah & Low, 2001).

3.1.5. The socioeconomic level

The interview sessions also revealed subtle layers that influenced the analysis. The layers within the analysis are socioeconomic, organizational, and individual level. At the socioeconomic level of analysis, interview data included quality of life, social support, and social stereotype. All the respondents

mentioned quality of life was different in New Zealand compared to Malaysia. They often mentioned, “They are not complaining. After all they are here to ensure that they make a better life for themselves.” The respondents were very positive about their situation. They didn’t mention about social stereotype literally but the respondents mentioned they thought as Asian they were stereotyped to work hard. Respondent E describes this experience as:

“So, I don’t mind the hard work. However, that could be a disadvantage for me because I end up with most of the job... leaving me with no time to socialize in the organization or outside of the organization.”

As demonstrated by a study conduct for the Human Rights commission (Girling, Liu, & Ward, 2010), Asian face discrimination in employment. Asians are forced to cope with discrimination everyday of their life. The positive attitude that Asians have towards discrimination is what helped them cope. Like Girling, Liu, and Ward’s (2010) study, all Malaysian employees have something positive to say about their experience of discrimination at the workplace.

3.1.6. The Organizational level

The emergent themes at the organizational level were HRM practices, performance management systems, and customer dealings. While most organization were reported to be compliant with anti-discrimination legislation, with the tendency to discourage individual or isolated cases of direct discrimination, subtle forms of indirect discrimination were evident in the respondents account of their experiences (Respondents C and E). However, organizations can choose to take notice of such implicit meaning, and organizations could stop it. Another example at the organizational level, respondent D reported that her male referee was asked about how she worked with a scarf, as though the scarf was seen as a handicap. Her referee did feel that this was a subtle form of discrimination. The HR department did not ask this question to her female referees.

3.1.7. Individual level

The background of the respondents was very important to them. The respondents felt their experiences in Malaysia had prepared them to embrace cultural differences in New Zealand. In addition, language was considered to be very important. The respondents found their English could be easily understood, and showed examples of organizational performance and satisfaction with their language ability. However, their main problem was the Kiwi accent took time to understand. This study also reinforce Burns’ (2000) EEO trust report that talented Asian employees are discriminated because of their culture, non-New Zealand accent, and being Asian.

4. Conceptual framework

As a result of the qualitative study, a new conceptual framework of HRM practices and its impact on employee experiences emerged. The discussion below leads to an understanding of the emergent conceptual framework.

4.1. Workplace diversity in the New Zealand Context

First, to understand the context of this study, the study explains the New Zealand context using the institutional theory. Researchers (Beechler, Bird, & Raghuram, 1993; Quintanilla, Susaeta, & Sanchez-

Mangas, 2008; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994) argue organizations are faced with different HRM issues in different countries. This study agrees that each country has its own views of HRM practices that are greatly influenced by the societal context (Paauwe & Boselle, 2007). This study found HRM practices that are specific to the New Zealand context. By understanding of how different Malaysian employees perceive HRM practices, this study will help New Zealand organizations to manage Malaysian employees. The researchers examined New Zealand because the New Zealand context is somewhat similar to the Malaysian context. Malaysia is considered a multicultural nation. However, its main societal division is divided into two categories, “Bumiputras” and “Non-Bumiputras”. Within the subcultures of bumiputras, there are the Malays and other indigenous people to Malaysia. The second subgroup is the Chinese and Indian, who are considered as “non-bumiputeras” (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005). The researchers find that the New Zealand context to be similar to Malaysian context of two sub division of social identities. New Zealand has the Maori and Pakeha identities. However, immigration of skilled and unskilled migrants to New Zealand has changed the cultural make-up of New Zealand. According to studies done in New Zealand on workplace diversity (Jones, Pringle, & Shepherd, 2000; Pringle & Scowcroft, 1996), changes in the workforce in New Zealand have impacted the biculturalism of New Zealand.

4.2. Work Culture in Malaysia and New Zealand

However, work culture in Malaysia differs from New Zealand. HRM practices ideally should be adaptable to any individual. According to the Martin-Alcazar, Remero-Fernandez and Sanchez-Gardey (2005), socioeconomic context will be influenced by employees’ cultural background. New Zealand work culture is described to represent the western model of HRM practices and policies (Pringle & Scowcroft, 1996). However, the Malaysian work culture is said to represent the eastern model (Lim, 2001). In comparison, someone from an eastern work culture needs to be able to adapt to the western work culture. For Malaysian labor to be comparable labor market for New Zealand (New Zealand Immigration Services, 2010), they need to be able to adapt to New Zealand work culture. This framework examines the nature of cultural background as an element to observing the integration of HRM practices for organization in New Zealand.

5. Conclusion

Limitations of this data analysis was that (1) employees come from different sectors and background; (2) interviewees come from different level and may have limited experience with HRM practices; (3) experiences are based on employees’ recollection of experiences with HRM practices; and (4) sample size is not large enough to make generalization. As an initial exploratory study, the researchers have more chances to examine and correct them in the later study.

Future research on employment experience of immigrants could focus on the influence of employees’ social identities on their employment experience and how HRM practices lead to organizational outcomes. This paper suggests the use of quantitative research design to test the framework of this study to develop statistical relationship between Malaysian Employees’ perceptions of HRM practices and organizational outcomes.

Overall, this study explores what employees experience and issues faced by Malaysian employees from an HRM perspective. New Zealand employers have not accepted employees from Malaysia, and recognize their experiences in Malaysia. This study found that subtle discrimination against Malaysian working experience is present. Perception of HRM practices was influenced by socioeconomic and organizational context that surround the implementation of the practice.

References

- Abdullah, A., & Low, A. H. M. (2001). *Understanding the Malaysian workforce: guidelines for managers* (Rev. ed.). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Malaysian Institute of Management.
- Abdullah, A., & Pedersen, P. (2003). *Understanding multicultural Malaysia: delights, puzzles & irritations*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Beechler, S., Bird, A., & Raghuram, S. (1993). Linking business strategy and human resource management practices in multinational corporations: a theoretical framework. *Advances in International Comparative Management*, 8, 199.
- Bhopal, M., & Rowley, C. (2005). Ethnicity as a management issue and resource: examples from Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11(4), 553 - 574.
- Burns, J. (2000). *Recruiting talent: A research report* Auckland: Equal Employment Opportunities Trust.
- Coolican, H. (1999). *Research methods and statistics in psychology* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton Educational.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Crows Nest, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- D'Netto, B., & Sohal, A. S. (1999). Human resource practices and workforce diversity: an empirical assessment. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20(8), 530-547.
- Edgar, F., & Geare, A. (2005). HRM practice and employee attitudes: different measures - different results. *Personnel Review*, 34(5), 534.
- Girling, A. N., Liu, J. H., & Ward, C. (2010). *Confident, equal, proud? A discussion paper on the barriers Asians face to equality in New Zealand: Human Rights Commission and Victoria University of Wellington's Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research*.
- Hunter, L. (2003). Research developments in employment relations and diversity: A British perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 41(1), 88-100.
- Jones, D., Pringle, J., & Shepherd, D. (2000). "Managing diversity" meets Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Personnel Review*, 29(3), 364-380.
- Kossek, E. E., Lobel, S. A., & Brown, J. (2006). Human resource strategies to manage workforce diversity: examining 'the business case'. In A. M. Konrad, P. Prasad & J. K. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of Workplace Diversity* (pp. 53-70). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Kumar, R. (2005). *Research methodology: A step by step guide for beginners* (Second ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Lim, L. (2001). Work-related values of Malays and Chinese Malaysians. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 1(2), 209.
- Martin-Alcazar, F., Romero-Fernandez, P. M., & Sanchez-Gardey, G. (2005). Strategic human resource management: integrating the universalistic, contingent, configurational and contextual perspectives. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(5), 633 - 659.
- New Zealand Immigration Services. (2010). *Work experience: comparable labour market*. Retrieved 23 September 2010, from <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/skilledmigrant/canipply/claimingpoints/workexperience.htm>

- O'Leary, Z. (2010). *The essential guide to doing your research project*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Paauwe, J., & Boselle, P. (2007). HRM and societal embeddednes. In P. F. Boxall, J. Purcell & P. M. Wright (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management* (pp. 166-184). Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, G. (2003). Diversity management, past, present and future. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 41(1), 13-24.
- Prasad, P., Pringle, J. K., & Konrad, A. M. (2006). Examining the contours of workplace diversity: concepts, contexts, and challenges. In A. M. Konrad, P. Prasad & J. K. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of Workplace Diversity* (pp. 1-18). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Pringle, J., & Scowcroft, J. (1996). Managing diversity: meaning and practice in new zealand organizations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 34(2), 28-43.
- Quintanilla, J., Susaeta, L., & Sanchez-Mangas, R. (2008). The diffusion of employment practices in multinationals: 'americanness' within US MNCs in Spain? *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50(5), 680-696.
- Rosenzweig, P. M., & Nohria, N. (1994). Influences on human resource management practices in multinational corporations. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 25(2), 229-251.
- Syed, J., & Pio, E. (2010). Veiled diversity? workplace experiences of muslim women in Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 27(1), 115-137.